

# matters familiar



e. g. fabricant

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## **DEDICATION**

For Frank and Betty, for the gifts of life and love—theirs,  
mine, and ours—and  
For M. A.; BeeEss; Tomiss; Jerome; J. L.; Fuffy; and The  
Brat, for helping me fill in the blanks.

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### 3 Chosen



The teenaged Volvo, a kaleidoscope of rust, gray primer, and gloss red, wheezed into a ground-floor space in the Twelfth Street garage. Marie Kohlfeldt snapped off the ignition and glared.

"For Christ's sake, Don—Do you have to do that with the kid in the car? And today, of all days?"

Her husband of nine months pinched the roach delicately and sucked the last life out of its glowing coal. "Jesus, honey, cut me some slack. Ronald Reagan's been in charge for five months and the band hasn't played so much as a toilet in six weeks. I'm having enough trouble dealing with another Catholic in the house."

Marie sighed, climbed out, and forced the rear door open. She leaned into the back seat and lifted the baby into his christening blanket. "If we get through this, it'll be the first promise to me you've kept since our wedding day!"

Don's ponytail trembled lazily while he held in the last of the smoke. He exhaled with more force than necessary. "Go ahead — I'll be along." Marie tried to

kick the door shut but it stopped halfway with a rusty croak. She slumped into it until it latched. *Good thing there'll be godparents and sponsors, she thought. Otherwise, I'd have to confess to breaking the Fifth Commandment.* Cooing and bubbling saliva brought her out of it. She smiled at the tiny, swaddled face as she emerged from the garage's darkness and headed up the alley toward the Cathedral's front steps. The bluff of its doeskin-colored stone protected the momentary peace.

Still absorbed as she made the corner, her vague sense of a physical presence was confirmed by sharp odors and a near-collision. She saw his boots first, shoulder-width apart—buckles and smooth, black leather up the calf; early aviator, maybe, but for the moldy cracks and dilapidation. His trousers featured sidelong stripes of hand-applied yellow material. For the effect, they might have been cavalry jodhpurs, rather than black Slim-fit jeans long ago consigned to thrift. The filthy fatigue jacket was anonymous. Its name-and-rank identifiers had been torn away and replaced with an amalgam of patches, pins, and bric-a-brac that added up to a busted-back and grounded starship commander from a nearby galaxy. A Jamaican-flag, knit cap, and greasy dreadlocks framed a stubbled face, inches from hers, that revealed nothing but wear. The eyes were masked by heavy wraparounds. The utter calm in the sound that emerged from between his uncharacteristically sturdy teeth banked her shock and fear.

"What's his name?"

"Halston."

A dirty index finger touched the infant's downy cheek. "Beautiful."

With that, he spun around and took the handlebars of an old bicycle festooned with street flotsam—im-

---

provised reflectors, foil-and-hanger antennae, and miscellaneous logos—and draped with makeshift saddlebags crammed with repossessions. He guided its flaccid tires away from her, up the K Street Mall.

Don loped up behind her. "What was that all about?"

"Nothing—I guess," she said, as she watched the figure recede.

Inside, Marie pulled the blanket away from the infant, which roused him enough to mewl a little. The priest nodded toward her. "And what name do you give this child?"

"Halston."

The priest winced slightly. "Halston...?"

"Just Halston," she said, beaming into the little pink face. "Halston Kohlfeldt."



Perched on the edge of his desk, Brother Ambrose folded his arms and furrowed his brow at the question. He frowned. "Mr. Kohlfeldt, *The Celestine Prophecy* is not on the study list for sophomore religion here at Christian Brothers. Your search for spiritual meaning will be guided by Scripture and acceptable theology—just like everyone else's. What you read outside class is your business."

*RING!*

Halston sighed, slung his backpack, and headed for the door, dogged by the usual exchanges of nudges and murmurs. Adrianna Wong caught him by the elbow in the hallway. "Hey, Aristotle! Gonna pick up from last year and start the fall semester of '97 as the designated deep-thinker of the Class of '99?"

His wan smile breached the embarrassment. "Yeah—I guess."

"So," she said as they merged into the stream of

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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